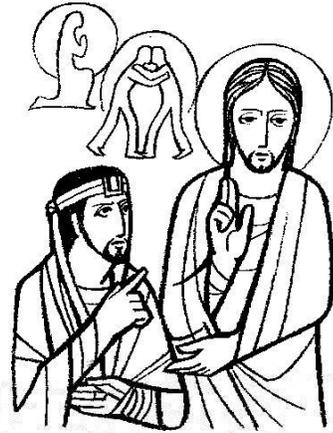


Lectionary Faith-Sharing Community

**31<sup>ST.</sup> ORDINARY SUNDAY**

Cycle B - October 31, 2021



**OPENING PRAYER**

Leader: I love you, O Lord, my strength, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer.

All: My God, my rock of refuge, my shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold!

Leader: Praised be the Lord, I exclaim, and I am safe from my enemies.

All: The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

Leader: Let us invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit:

**Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth.**

**Oh God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy his consolations, through Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

**FIRST READING** [ Deuteronomy 6 (2-6) ]

***Moses spoke to the people, saying:***

***"Fear the Lord, your God, and keep, throughout the days of your lives, all his statutes and commandments which I enjoin on you, and thus have long life. Hear then, Israel, and be careful to observe them, that you may grow and prosper the more, in keeping with the promise of the Lord, the God of your fathers, to give you a land flowing with milk and honey.***

***"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.***

***Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today."***

The book of Deuteronomy is written in the form of six long sermons by Moses. The author uses the highly valued character to review God's covenant with his people, which is nothing other than the Lord's relationship with man. God has always been solid in his attitude. He has never failed to be faithful, nor has he broken a single one of his promises. God is committed to people. And in response, a demonstration of love is expected that can be translated into practicing the commandments and listening (for meditation!) to the Word of the Lord.

Today's passage presents us, after an introduction, a part of the prayer that the Jews recite several times a day: the Shemá ("Hear, O Israel"). This prayer is at the same time a confession of faith in a unique God. It is a reminder to keep alive the love of God, which, as if it were a single commandment, consolidates in this gesture, the entire Law.

When one is in love, true happiness does not lie in the fact that the loved one indulges us. (If this happens, an urgent review is needed because there is something that is not working well in such relationship). A person truly in love wants and goes out of his way to see the person who is the object of that love happy. The happiness of the lover takes a back seat to the happiness of the other.

We have to apply this same formula before God. If we review the text, we are invited to love God "with all our will", that is, with all the strength possible, with all the heart. And this shouldn't be a command if we really were in love with God. Because for those who feel that love of a person in love that we mentioned before, they do not need to be dictated by a rule, a mandate to love. That comes out on its own, naturally, without being asked.

- (1) Reflect and discuss the word "you shall love" in this text. It looks like a commandment, right? How far is it possible to fulfill an order like this? How can the heart be "forced" to love?
- (2) Also in the text it is ordered to "fear the Lord." What does it mean to "fear the Lord"?
- (3) Happiness is promised in the text if one observes the commandments. But also another verb is added that is the key to that happiness. What is that verb? What do you think about that recommendation?
- (4) Why is it important for Jews to recite the Shemá several times a day?
- (5) What can Christians do to keep our attention on God in the same way?
- (6) Will we have a long life and prosperity if we keep the commandments? How can this be interpreted?

## SECOND READING [ Hebrews 7 (23-28) ]

### **Brothers and sisters:**

***The levitical priests were many because they were prevented by death from remaining in office, but Jesus, because he remains forever, has a priesthood that does not pass away. Therefore, he is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession for them. It was fitting that we should have such a high priest: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, higher than the heavens. He has no need, as did the high priests, to offer sacrifice day after day, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did that once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints men subject to weakness to be high priests, but the word of the oath, which was taken after the law, appoints a son, who has been made perfect forever.***

From the time of Moses the priesthood was established. Even a family of the descendants of Jacob dedicated themselves to this mission, those of the tribe of Levi. That is why they are called Levites. There is also a book of the Bible, Leviticus, dedicated to establishing the norms for the worship of God and whose content was applied by the Levites.

These priests offered to God the sacrifices and burnt offerings that the people brought to the temple. But those sacrificed victims never obtained forgiveness of sins. And on the other hand, none of those priests lived longer than the rest of the mortals. Naturally, it was necessary to replace them with the passage of time. Another thing: Those priests, before offering the sacrifice of the people, had to offer redress to God for their own faults

With Jesus Christ, this changed forever. First, he no longer has to be hereditary, because he lives forever, after his resurrection. He no longer has to pass on his priesthood, for it belongs to him forever. Second, he did not have to offer sacrifices himself, since he did not know sin, so his mediation is more effective, it is no longer symbolic but authentic. And finally, his priesthood does not come from a human decision, but from an initiative of God.

Therefore, everyone who approaches him with faith (imitating the attitudes of Christ) can achieve the same consecration by sharing his divinity one day. The intercession that is obtained from Jesus Christ is not simply to obtain a favor from God, but something that can be more convenient and lasting: our transformation. The priesthood of Christ helps us in our conversion process.

- (1) Review all the adjectives that apply to Jesus Christ in this reading. Which one attracts you the most, and why?
- (2) What hopes or guarantees does the content of this reading offer you?
- (3) What benefit can we extract from the reflection of this text?

## GOSPEL [ Mark 12 (28-34) ]

***One of the scribes came to Jesus and asked him, "Which is the first of all the commandments?" Jesus replied, "The first is this: Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.***

***The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these."***

**The scribe said to him, "Well said, teacher. You are right in saying, 'He is One and there is no other than he.' And 'to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself' is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."**

**And when Jesus saw that he answered with understanding, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."**

**And no one dared to ask him any more questions.**

Scribes were people who spent their time reading and studying the Scriptures. Some of them opposed Jesus Christ, as did a few Pharisees. The episode in this Gospel passage is different, for it presents us with a harmonious dialogue instead of a bitter discussion. This scribe brings before Jesus Christ one of the most common concerns of those times, which was to interpret the true meaning of the Law, and try to decipher if any of the commandments was more important than the rest.

The answer of Jesus Christ presents in a few words a doctrine not presented in the form of a prohibition, like some commandments of the Decalogue, but on the contrary, in the affirmative. For this he uses a text that that scribe knew by heart, and extends it, adding the part of love of neighbor. In those days "neighbor" was understood only to other Jews. The Lord in this case refers to all human beings (as confirmed by the parable of the Good Samaritan).

An interesting detail is the sentence: "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." Because one of the missions of Jesus Christ consisted of announcing the Kingdom of God (that is what the word Gospel means, Good News). The divine Master does not miss an opportunity to teach and here he does it again.

He means that living love is a sign of belonging to the Kingdom. It is not about two loves, God and neighbor, but two faces of the same love. When we were baptized we received an anointing with the Holy Chrism, which consecrated to us as priests. And this is what our priesthood of the baptized consists of, to be mediators between God and men in a movement of "give and take" of love, which makes possible the establishment of the Kingdom of God here and now. If love reigned in the world, it would be different. When love finally be reigning in the world (that day will come), the Kingdom of God will have been established on earth.

(1) What are the attitudes and concerns of the scribe? And those of Jesus Christ?

(2) Why does Jesus Christ associate the commandments with love? (to God ... and neighbor) [Read Romans 13 (8-10)]

(3) From the response of Jesus Christ we can deduce that doing the right thing is the beginning of an authentically lived faith. Do you agree? Why?

(4) What does it mean by "loving oneself"?

(5) Read 1 John 3 (15-17) What do you think?

(6) Read 1 John 4 (20-21) What do you think?

(7) Read 1 John 2 (5-11) What do you think?

## CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Lord of the day and night, of the beginning and of the end: At the closing of this meeting, once again we lift up our hearts to You, divine source of all life.*

All: **We thank you for the gifts you have bestowed on us. We thank you for the love expressed in companionship and understanding, mutual respect and shared ideas. We give you thanks for your holy power that will help us in our concerns that we have shared. For these and all the gifts that come from You, we give you thanks.**

Leader: *Lord hear our prayers* (attendees can propose their own needs of prayer)

All: **In the same way in which we have being blessed by your presence as we meet, we ask now to bless our safe return to our homes. May your holy blessing be over us + in the name of the Father ...**

Leader: *May the King of the eternal glory gather us together in His heavenly banquet. Amen.*